

VETERINARY SERVICES NOTICE

Subject: Spaying and Identification of Mexican Heifers

To: Directors, VS Regions
Area Veterinarians in Charge
Border Port Veterinarians

I. PURPOSE

This notice is to advise you of changes in the protocol for the spaying and identification of Mexican heifers for importation into the United States and to provide instructions for their implementation.

II. GENERAL

All female Mexican cattle (heifers) presented for spaying for the purpose of importation into the United States must have been born in Mexico and must be under 18 months of age. Within 60 days of being presented at the U.S. port of entry, each heifer must be negative to a test for tuberculosis unless it is from an accredited-free herd. This test must be performed by a Mexican accredited veterinarian. The test must be an intradermal injection of purified protein derivative (Mycobacterium bovis) tuberculin into the caudal fold. The injection site must be examined 72 hours later, both visually and by palpation. (A negative test occurs when no response is seen or palpated.) The negative status of the animals must be certified on a Mexican tuberculosis test certificate, with each animal being identified by an official blue Mexican eartag. The eartag numbers should be correlated with the official spay tag numbers on the certificate.

III. OVARIECTOMY (SPAY) SURGICAL PROCEDURE

The ovariectomy (spay) must only be performed by a U.S. or Mexican accredited veterinarian. Prior to removal of the ovaries, the entire uterus must be palpated by the surgeon to ensure that the heifer is not pregnant. Any heifer found to be pregnant shall not be ovariectomized and will not be imported into the United States as a spayed heifer.

A complete surgical ovariectomy shall be performed on each eligible heifer via a flank incision after using an appropriate anesthetic (skin block or regional nerve block) procedure. Upon completion of the ovariectomy, the skin incision must be closed with appropriate surgical suture material (sterilized cotton tape, monofilament, stainless steel, silk, surgical staples, or equivalent suture material) acceptable to the veterinary medical profession.

Upon completion of the surgery, the heifers will remain at the location where the surgery was performed for a minimum of 21 days before being moved to the port of entry in the United States or another destination.

IV. IDENTIFICATION

All eligible animals which are spayed will have an official USDA "Spay" metal eartag applied immediately after the surgery is performed. In addition, all spayed animals will be identified with a distinct, permanent mark which is legible on the right side of the tailhead as defined in Title 9, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 78. This will signify their official status as Mexican origin heifers which have been spayed. The mark will be an "M" with a slash which overlays one leg of the M and will be in a character of at least

2 inches and not more than 3 inches in height. This distinct mark must not be applied prior to the surgery.

V. SUPERVISION AND CERTIFICATION

All procedures associated with the spaying, identification, and certification of Mexican heifers will be monitored or supervised by a Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture as follows:

- * The VMO will be present during the spaying procedure to ensure that it is performed in accordance with the provisions in this notice and that a complete ovariectomy was accomplished. If the VMO is not present to observe and verify that the surgery was completed, the animal will not be eligible to be imported into the United States as a spayed heifer.

- * The VMO will supervise the application of official USDA "Spay" metal eartags to the animals that have been verified as having received a complete ovariectomy.

- * The VMO will countersign the "Certificate of Ovariectomy," which must be completed by the accredited veterinarian who performed the surgery. The certificate must identify each heifer spayed by its spay eartag number and indicate the date and location of the surgery. If a Mexican blue eartag is present or applied to the animal at the time of spaying, that tag should also be recorded on the certificate and correlated with the spay tag number.

- * The VMO will be present to observe and verify the official identification marking of the animal to ensure that only officially spayed animals are so identified.

VI. IMPORTATION

Spayed heifers must be presented for entry into the United States within 180 days from the date of surgery. Animals arriving at the port of import in excess of 180 days, or without official identification (Mexican blue eartag and USDA official spay tag) and certification will not be eligible to enter the United States as spayed heifers.

If only one of the official eartags (blue Mexican eartag or USDA official spay tag) is present on the animal when it is presented for entry, the animal may be entered into the United States as a spayed heifer under the following circumstances:

- * The accompanying documentation references the number of the missing eartag;

- * The accompanying documentation certifies that tuberculosis testing was conducted within the 60-day timeframe and was negative;

- * Physical evidence indicates that another eartag had been present;

- * Physical evidence indicates that a surgical procedure was performed in the flank area; and

- * The animal is otherwise healthy and has the spay mark on the right tailhead.

Animals must be refused entry if it cannot be established by certification and official eartag numbers that such animals have been ovariectomized within 180 days prior to presentation for entry and that they were negative to a tuberculin test within 60 days of presentation to the port.

Donald W. Luchsinger
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Veterinary Services

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